

China blocks VPN services that skirt online censorship

January 23 2015, by Jack Chang



In this Aug. 19, 2013 file photo, computer users sit near a monitor display with a message from the Chinese police on the proper use of the Internet at an Internet cafe in Beijing, China. China is blocking VPN services that let users skirt online censorship of popular websites such as Google and Facebook amid a wider crackdown on online information, tech companies and specialists said Friday, Jan. 23, 2015. The virtual private network provider Golden Frog wrote on its blog that the controls have hit a wide swath of VPN services. The popular provider Astrill informed its users this week that the controls have started hitting iPhone access to services such as Gmail. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan, File)

China is blocking VPN services that let users skirt online censorship of popular websites such as Google and Facebook amid a wider crackdown on online information, tech companies and specialists said Friday.

The virtual private network provider Golden Frog wrote on its blog that the controls have hit a wide swath of VPN services. The popular provider Astrill informed its users this week that its VPN protocols for Apple mobile devices to access services such as Gmail have been blocked.

The Chinese government blocks thousands of websites to prevent what it deems politically sensitive information from reaching Chinese users. Many foreigners in China as well as millions of Chinese depend on VPNs to connect to servers outside the country and access blocked information and Google-based business tools. VPNs encrypt and reroute Internet traffic so that censors can't tell what's being accessed.

"The Chinese government has attempted to curtail the use of VPNs that its citizens use to escape the Great Firewall for a couple years," wrote Golden Frog President Sunday Yokubaitis in a statement. "This week's attack on VPNs that affected us and other VPN providers is more sophisticated than what we've seen in the past."

The Chinese government's agency for regulating the Internet did not immediately respond to questions.

China-based entrepreneur Richard Robinson said the controls have particularly hurt small- and medium-sized foreign companies that depend on VPNs. Many larger companies can afford direct connections to servers outside the country, he said.

Over the past weeks, Chinese censors have already blocked what remaining access there is to Gmail and other Google products. Google

services have been periodically blocked or limited since 2010 when the company said it would no longer cooperate with China's censors.

"These smaller businesses, they're dependent on Gmail," Robinson said.

The crackdown comes during sensitive political times, as President Xi Jinping's government prosecutes top officials accused of corruption, said Xiao Qiang, an adjunct professor with UC Berkeley's School of Information.

"We all know that China is in the middle of a very ferocious power struggle or political cleansing under the name of an anti-corruption campaign," Xiao said. "That to me is a very clearly related fact with the amount of political rumors and information related to China's high politics showing up in websites outside of China."

And while the controls hurt businesses that depend on online information and tools, Chinese censors are more worried about restricting political information, Xiao said.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: China blocks VPN services that skirt online censorship (2015, January 23) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-01-china-blocks-vpn-skirt-online.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--